

Homily Notes for Sunday, Mar 17, 2019 2nd Lent C

Readings: Gen 15:5-18; the covenant with Abraham

Philippians 3:17-4:1; a call to persevere in God's values in conflict with those of the world.

Luke 9:28-36; the Transfiguration, revealing Jesus's divinity.

- 1. The Call to Discipleship:** Let us remember that last week we reflected on Jesus's 40 days in the desert and how to deal with the basic temptations of life which can be summarized by the temptations of the flesh, of pride and or vanity. This week we will move on to having the courage to really change, to be **transformed** into the image of Christ, so that we might be worthy disciples.
- 2. First reading:** The readings from Genesis explains how obedience to God transforms the childless and pagan *Abram* into the *Abraham* who became the prototype of trusting faith and the father of God's Chosen People. This obedience transformed childless Abram into Patriarch Abraham and believer in one God. The Genesis 12 reading is the first encounter between Abram and God. Abram was prosperous in land and livestock, but he had no children, and that, to people of his time, was the most serious of all possible deprivations. So God challenged him with an offer: "*I will make of you a great nation.*" But God's requirements were absolute: "*Go forth from the land of your kin.*" Then in Genesis 15 God forms a covenant with Abram. The requirements were to become even more absolute when, after Abraham finally had a son, God asked him to sacrifice that same son (Genesis 22:1-18). God asks us, too, to leave our old life of sin behind and go forth with Him into a period of repentance, renewal of life and transformation.
- 3. Second Reading:** St Paul calls on the Philippians to imitate him in his discipleship. He is very clear:
"For many, as I often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their "shame." Their minds are occupied with earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.... Therefore... stand firm in the Lord.

This calls on us to be holy, especially in regards to gluttony (excessive desires and participation in appetites and pleasures) and in regards to modesty and sexual purity (See I Thess 4:3-8). We are called to the glory of God himself, as Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John and as we shall be in heaven.
- 4. The Gospel: the Transfiguration of Jesus:** The primary purpose of Jesus' Transfiguration was to consult his heavenly Father and ascertain His plan for Our Lord's suffering, death and resurrection. The secondary aim was to make three of his chosen disciples, later to be considered pillars of the Church (Gal 2:9), aware of His glory and majesty, commensurate with being the Son of God. The event was clearly a mind-blowing supernatural event. They barely knew how to respond. It was meant to strengthen their faith and hope and to give them courage to persevere through the future ordeal. The language was very clear, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." This is language similar to Jesus's baptism. On this mountain God reveals Jesus as His Son -- His beloved -- the One in Whom He is well pleased and to Whom we must listen.
- 5. This was important to St. Peter, much later when in his second epistle, he recalled this event:**
"We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that unique declaration came to him from the majestic glory, "This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased'" (2 Pet 1:17-18).

6. The scene of Heavenly glory: Peter, James and John received a view of the glorious divinity of Jesus. While praying, Jesus was transfigured into a shining figure, full of Heavenly glory. This reminds us of Moses and Elijah who also experienced the Lord in all His glory. Their presence in Matthew's transfiguration account emphasizes Jesus who is the culmination of the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) in salvation history." Note that both prophets were initially rejected by the people but were vindicated by God. The Jews believed that these men did not die because God Himself took Moses (Deut 34:5-6), and Elijah was carried to heaven in a whirlwind (II Kings 2:11).

7. Let us note that the teachings on either side of the Transfiguration are predictions of the Passion. Before is the prophecy of the passion at Caesarea Philippi along with the conditions of discipleship: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt 16:24). After the Transfiguration is the disciples' failure to cure the boy possessed by a demon, the necessity of prayer and fasting and the second prophecy of the passion (Mt 17:22-23).

8. The danger of expecting the life of discipleship to be easy. Example of church member infected with "cheap grace". See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (first published in Germany in 1937. In it Bonhoeffer asserts that the "cheap grace" of the church led to the horrors of the Nazis).

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

9. The challenge facing us today: Are we willing to take up the responsibility of serving God?

- a. First, will we do the internal work necessary to be transformed into the kind of people God needs (well-formed in the faith, holy and committed to him, and ready to serve him in the world – prophet, priest and king)?
- b. Second, will we represent God and his cause in the world, even though we may be persecuted for it?
- c. Third, will we take this calling upon us for the sake of the salvation of the world?

10. Personally: What is the one thing that God wants me to get out of this Mass in order to become the "better-version-of-myself" that he wants me to be? This could be called a transformation or a metamorphosis.

11. So, we need to live out our baptism. The world needs us to live out our baptism. Our friends, family and contacts need us to live out our baptism. And most importantly, we need to live out our baptism.

12. Particular areas of challenge:

1. Struggling vigorously to make ourselves conform to the moral values and calling of Christ.
2. Being willing to talk and share with those who are not Christian but need understanding and help.
3. Being willing to represent God's values in life, especially those that may be controversial.
4. Being willing to live a Gospel life in generosity, mercy and holiness, especially caring for the sick and the poor.
5. To take up our responsibility to be evangelists, especially in our communities and especially among the young.